

Recommendation 4-1 – The County should focus on its core services and only continue or expand “sports” functions if there is a partner (sports group, local municipality) that brings funding and long-term operational management and maintenance.

Recommendation 4-2 – Active sports functions should only be provided where there is no detrimental impact on the natural and cultural heritage of the park and when the operation of active sports does not financially detract/prohibit from other maintenance and restoration activities, or passive recreation opportunities.

A “dry” Akron Falls (Summer 2002)



4.0 OVERALL SYSTEM RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 COUNTY ROLE IN RECREATION SERVICES DELIVERY

As a result of the demographic decline in the City of Buffalo and the transfer of population to the outlying towns and villages, there has been pressure to have the County Parks serve more local active recreation functions. This trend needs to be evaluated carefully by the County because “active” (organized and structured) sports recreation is expensive to provide and is generally outside the County’s “Mission Statement”. Over the years the provision of active recreation facilities has impacted the overall appearance and quality of certain areas of the heritage parks. As well, the valuable assets of the parks – the heritage buildings and structures and the natural environment areas – will require significant and costly management and restoration efforts over the long term.

The County should therefore focus on its core services, with an emphasis on the provision of passive, nature-oriented recreation, and only continue or expand “sports” functions if there is a partner (sports group, local municipality) that brings funding and long-term operational management and maintenance. The provision of active facilities should only be undertaken in areas where there is no negative impact, either visually or physically on the parks natural areas or heritage resources. The Evans Soccer Club utilizing the Wendt Beach Soccer Fields is an example of a successful collaborative arrangement for sports facilities that are located in an otherwise underutilized area of the park.

4.2 OPEN SPACE SYSTEM PLANNING

Erie County encompasses significant natural environment features, including geological formations, waterways, and forested areas. Many of these are included within the park system. The Erie County park system, in conjunction with State and municipally owned lands, waterway systems and other natural areas provide the framework

for a connected system of greenways, trails corridors, parks and open space lands that support natural environment protection and recreation purposes.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP), have recently undertaken the 2001 update of the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan. First prepared in 1990, the Plan identifies policies and actions for conservation of open space lands, significant natural areas, and cultural heritage sites throughout the State. In recognition of growing public support for the conservation of open space and the underlying principles of environmental and heritage preservation, the 2001 Plan sets a strategy for working collaboratively and in partnership with landowners, private organizations, the federal government and local governments to identify and protect a cohesive framework of open space. Open space is defined as including agricultural lands, forests, wetlands, undeveloped shorelines, public parks, water bodies, and certain archaeological and heritage features. The Plan recognizes that conservation does not necessarily mean acquisition by public agencies.

The Open Space Conservation Plan identifies priority projects, which are deemed deserving of immediate attention from the NYSDEC, NYSOPRHP, and their partners, based on environmental significance, land use patterns, and recreational and cultural resource preservation needs. The following are identified conservation projects, and their attributes in Erie County. Several of the Erie County parks are located in proximity to these features (noted following).

- Eighteen Mile Creek – *important migratory stopover and corridor for songbirds, and diverse plant and animal species. Four rare or uncommon species, and historic observations of State endangered reptile. (Eighteen Mile Creek Park)*
- Cattaraugus Creek and tributaries – *the most important Lake Erie tributary for the salmonid fishery within New York State, supporting spawning and habitat. Also provides recreational boating (canoeing and kayaking) and access to Lake Erie. (Scoby Dam)*

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS FOR FUTURE MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS

The following are general observations made by the planning staff throughout the course of the study and during the numerous site visits made to various park properties. These are recommendations that apply to the operations aspect of the parks, but impact both the future function and aesthetics of the parks system.

- *Consideration should be given to establishing a plant nursery on one or more of the County properties. This would include selecting a relatively level, protected area for the installation of smaller tree saplings or seedlings that would eventually mature to a size for transplanting within the parks system. This is viewed as a longer term cost benefit for the Parks Department, rather than purchasing larger plant stock for immediate installation. Many of the original park plans showed that such facilities existed previously in the older county parks.*
- *Tree cutting should be minimized, with priority given to dead or dying trees with potential for dangerous or damaging impact if they fell. Consideration should be given to establishing a policy for replanting new trees for each tree removed from a park.*





- Consideration should be given to establishing a composting site or facility within the park system, possibly one in the northern part of the county and one in the south. This would enable the Parks Department to trim and cut trees, and dispose of natural debris in a manner which would be productive and cost-effective.
- Plant only native and hardy species of trees and shrubs within the parks. Consider non-native species only near certain structures or within specialty gardens.
- Keep maintenance facilities and service yards well maintained and looking good, particularly those that are within open view of park users and visitors. Consideration should be given to screen these service-related facilities wherever possible, particularly at Chestnut Ridge Park.
- Reduce the “dumping” of garbage and natural debris within view of park users or near environmentally sensitive areas, such as along the banks of Sprague Brook. Select strategic, out-of-the-way, locations for any dumping or stockpile sites; the stockpile location at Emery Park is an example of a well-sited facility.
- Consider establishing “quiet zones” within the parks or consider identifying entire parks as “quiet parks.” This precedent has been set at other parks throughout the country to combat rowdiness and loud music from “boom-boxes” or car stereos. Quiet zones allow for peaceful solitude in the natural areas and a respect for other park users in picnic and other recreation areas. Exceptions would be made for special events, concerts or other permitted activities.

- Great Lakes and Niagara River Access, Shore Lands and Vistas – one of the Region’s most significant natural resources supporting the Great Lakes fishery, and migratory waterfowl. The Niagara River is renowned as as a prime bird flyway corridor, and designated the first Globally Significant Important Bird Area (IBA) in the United States (by the National Audobon Society, US Partner Designate of BirdLife International). Increased pressure from recreational uses on the waterways is noted. (Wendt Beach, Bennett Beach, Riverwalk, Isle View Park, Towpath, Ontario Street Boatlaunch, Buffalo River)
- Urban Wetlands – a number of wetlands having significant resident and migrant wildlife habitat are identified in Tonawanda, Lackawanna, Amherst, Cheektowaga, and Buffalo. The most significant being the Tifft Nature Preserve, in Buffalo, and the Klydel Wetlands, in North Tonawanda. Other important wetlands exist in the South Buffalo area near Tifft Nature Preserve and the Buffalo River.

Based on conservation priorities, the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan has led to the acquisition of the following properties by the NYSDEC or NYSOPRHP, in Erie County. Sites with potential implications for the Erie County park system are noted.

- Knox Farm State Park - a 650 acre former estate of heritage significance, to be developed for equestrian trails, hiking, and farm related education/interpretation opportunities.
- Hampton Brook Woods - an additional 56 ac. adjacent to the Town of Hamburg Hampton Brook Woods Park, and including 2,700 feet of shoreline along 18 Mile Creek.
- Motor Island and Strawberry Island - undeveloped islands in the Upper Niagara River designated as New York State significant coastal fish and wildlife habitat. A state funded shoreline restoration project and rehabilitation of wetland habitat is proposed.
- Woodlawn Beach State Park - 106 ac. of land on Lake

Erie, newly developed to provide water-based recreation, protect/restore the sensitive dune environment and to serve as an interpretive/educational resource.

- The Canalway Trail - completion of the 348 mile Canalway Trail linking Lake Erie to the Hudson River, a key objective of the Canal Recreationway Plan (Ellicott Creek Park).

It will be important for the County to assist in the identification of significant open space lands within Erie County that contribute to a regional open space system, and to work collaboratively with the State and local municipalities on a comprehensive policy framework that supports open space conservation. The County needs to take a leadership role in coordinating the services provided when jurisdictions overlap. This is particularly important along the Niagara River, Erie Canal, Lake Erie and other major river or creek corridors such as Eighteen Mile Creek, where the State has interests. Leadership should be exercised where there is a recreation resource of regional or national significance, like the Buffalo Olmsted Parks System, intra-regional trail systems (i.e. the Erie Canalway Trail, the Seaway Trail, waterfront or river-based greenways), and ecological corridors such as the Niagara River, Buffalo River and Lake Erie shoreline.

4.3 PARKS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

To meet the County Parks mission and mandate, the focus of park operations and management should be on:

- *preservation and restoration of cultural heritage features;*
- *preservation and restoration of the natural systems;*
- *parks improvements to address safety and liability issues, upgrade park appearances, and enhance the park user experience;*
- *environmentally responsible parks management.*

Each park needs a management strategy that is tailored to the specific park and fits into the overall Parks Classification. To ensure the

Recommendation 4-3 – The County needs to take a leadership role when planning and managing regionally significant parks resources. The County should continue to support (through acquisition and/or management), the Lake Erie Greenway proposed along the waterfront, and regional and inter-regional trails like the Erie Canal, and the Seaway trail.

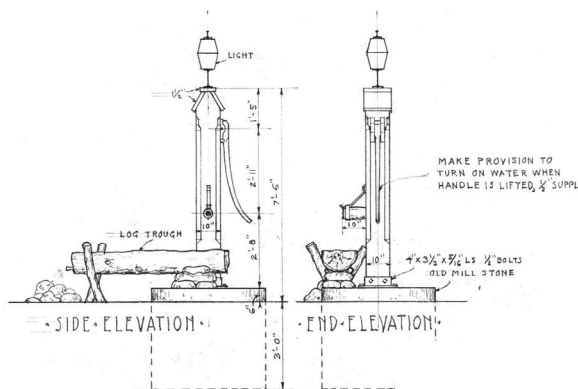
Recommendation 4-4 – The County should assemble a Natural Resources Inventory to be used as the basis for decision-making in matters of environmental protection, resource management and ecological enhancement.

Recommendation 4-5 – The County should work collaboratively with the State, local governments, private landowners to preserve waterfront lands, river and stream corridors, greenways, and significant natural environment areas that contribute to a connected county-wide system of parks, trails, and greenways for environmental conservation and recreation purposes.





The historic WPA era structures, in combination with the natural environment in which they are situated, would suggest that the Erie County heritage parks are worthy of consideration under the National Register of Historic Places.



preservation and restoration of the natural and cultural heritage features contained within the park, the management of each park should be based on a “zoning” system that recognizes the carrying capacity of the park and clearly identifies: *significant resource protection areas (both cultural and natural), areas for enhancement of ecological functions, and existing or potential facilities development areas.*

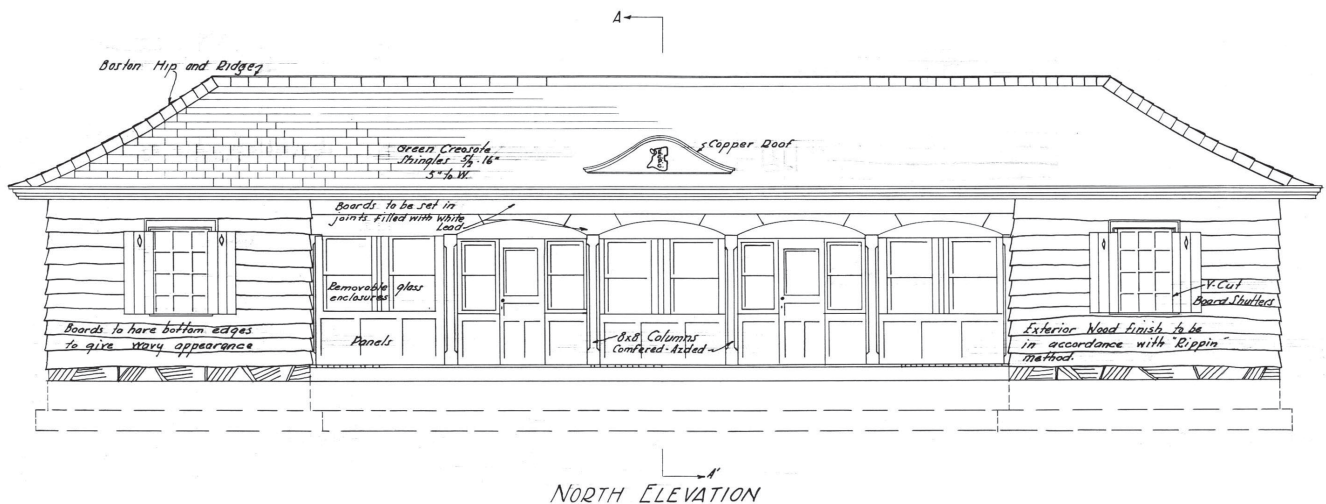
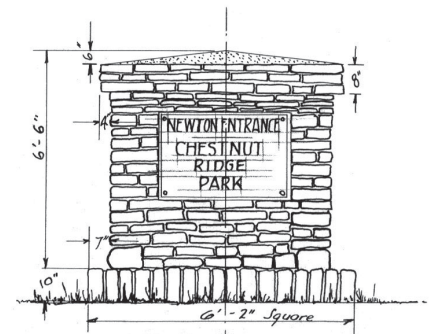
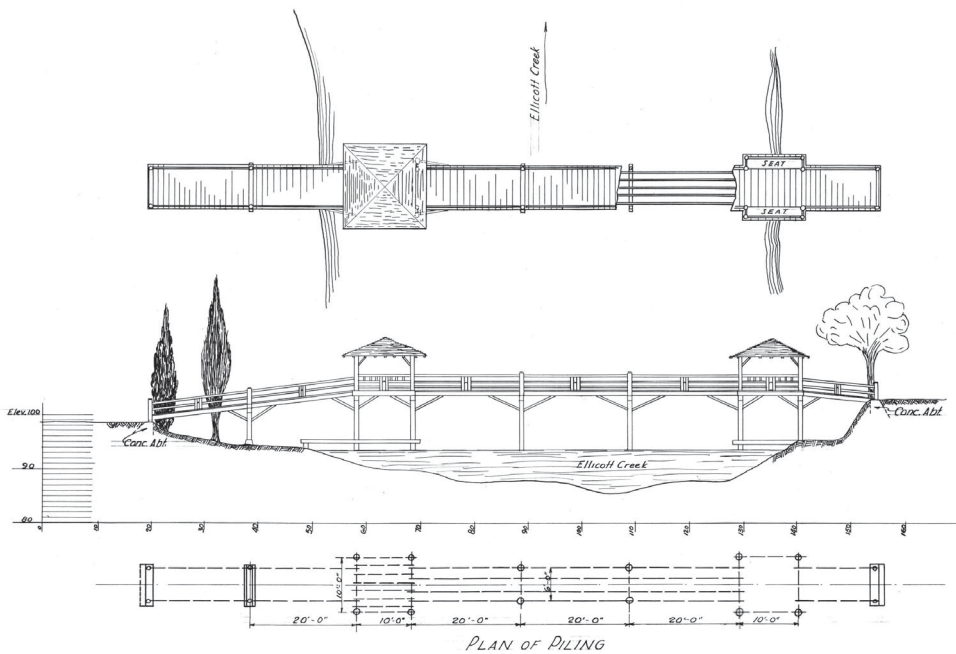
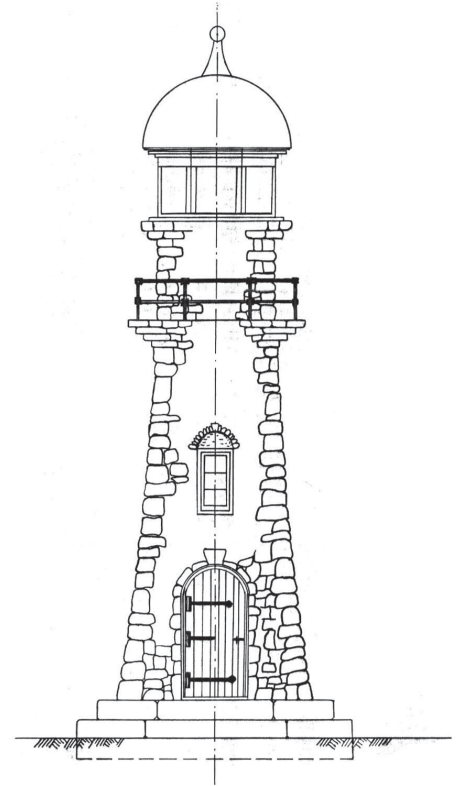
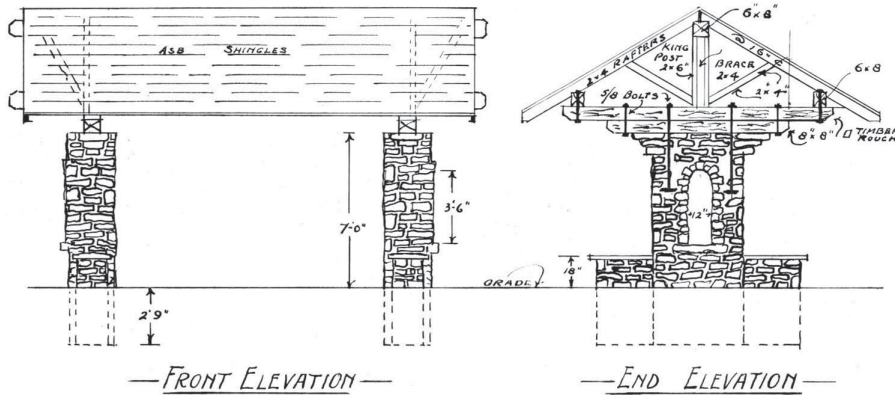
In support of an environmentally-based park management system, and to ensure the preservation of the significant buildings and structures, there is a need to adopt more contemporary maintenance practices, and to re-deploy or retrain some staff with skills to *restore and rebuild declining facilities.* Ecological management practices would include *changing the mowing regimes, establishing re-naturalization strategies and improving aquatic habitats* (e.g. rehabilitating open water ponds, establishing natural riparian corridors), and *limiting use of herbicides and pesticides.*

4.3.1 PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE FEATURES

The Erie County heritage parks include a large number of excellent examples of WPA structures, including the casinos, picnic pavilions, stone cairns, and shelters. Constructed with thoughtful design and precise craftsmanship, the WPA structures are significant for their association with the history of the county and state park system throughout the nation, and the contributions of Depression-era work groups. Their efforts have created structures of lasting quality, in tune with their natural setting that define a style in architecture and landscape design.

These historic structures, in combination with the natural environment in which they are situated, would suggest that the Erie County heritage parks are worthy of consideration under the National Register of Historic Places. In the Minnesota State Park system, there are several examples of such designations, including:

Blue Mounds State Park - WPA era heritage resources are located in a historic district that contains four structures and one building constructed along Mound Creek.



Recommendation 4-6 – The County should continue to support the preservation of significant cultural heritage resources, such as the County heritage parks, and the Buffalo Olmsted Parks System, in order to ensure that these important regional resources are adequately maintained. The County should collaborate with other stakeholders to seek senior government partners to assist in funding the ongoing operations of these facilities.

Recommendation 4-7 – The County should consider applying for “National Historic Register of Historic Places” status for the five oldest ‘Heritage’ parks: Chestnut Ridge Park, Como Lake Park, Ellicott Creek Park, Emery Park, and Akron Falls Park.

Recommendation 4-8 – The County should re-deploy or retrain certain staff to repair and restore declining park’s facilities, i.e. stone shelters, picnic tables, steps and walkways, etc.

Recommendation 4-9 – The County should undertake an “adaptive re-use feasibility study” to find appropriate and financially responsible uses for the main casino buildings and other historic park structures.

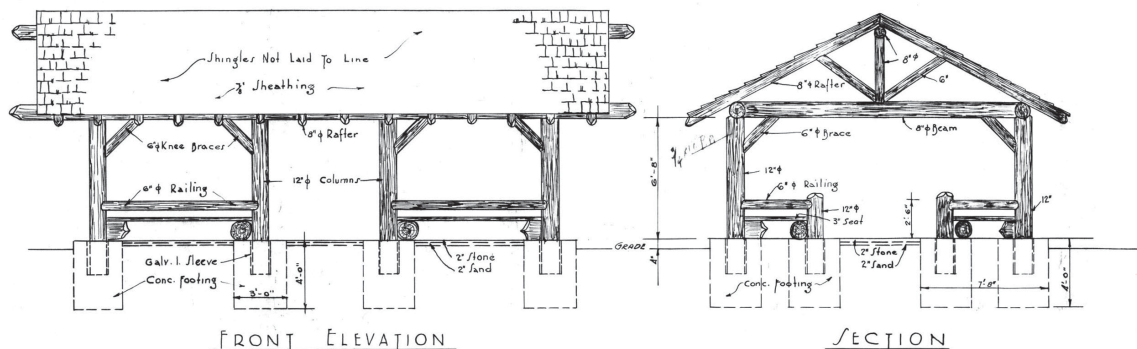
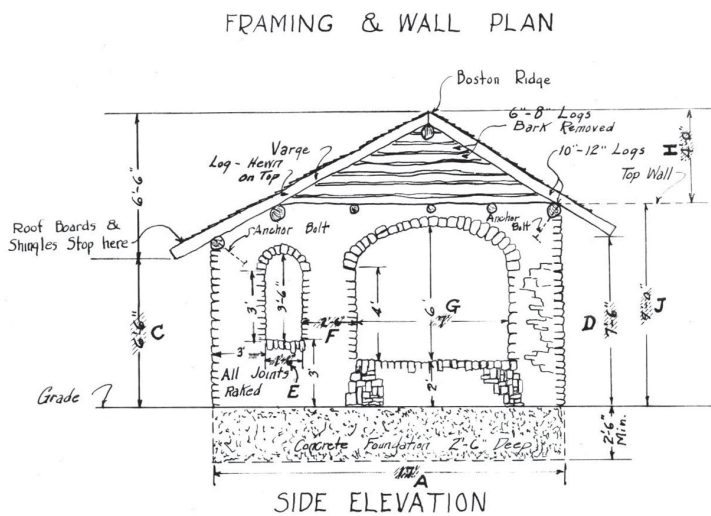
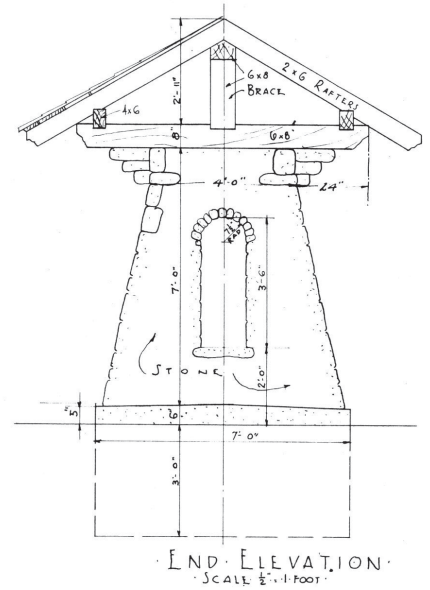
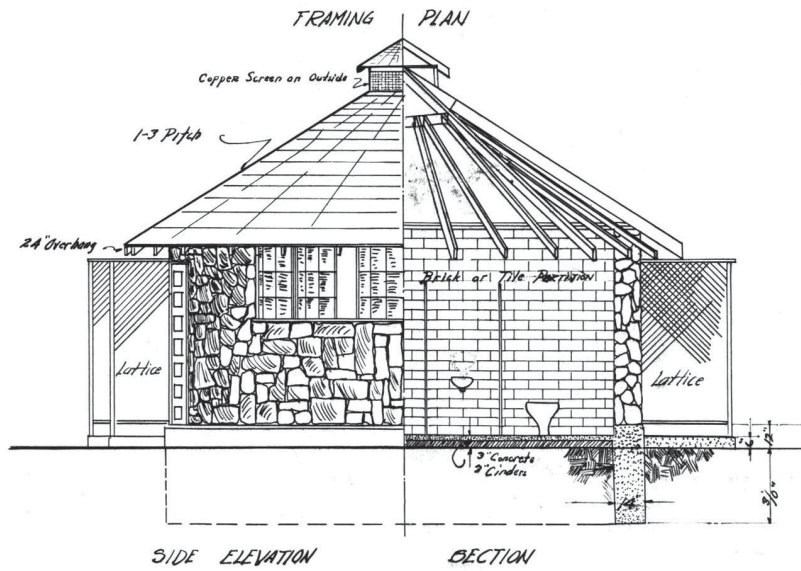


Buffalo River State Park (Minnesota) – WPA era heritage resources include three buildings and three structures, within a 19 acre historic district that defines the original area of construction that took place in the park.

The County should consider applying for “National Historic Register of Historic Places” status, as designated by the National Parks Service, for the five oldest parks. This would elevate these parks to a new status in the region, equivalent to that bestowed on the Historic Olmsted Parks System in Buffalo (1868 – 1890s), and the Niagara Reservation State Park (1880s-1890s), in Niagara Falls and would qualify the parks for Federal grants for historic preservation/restoration as funding programs are available.

For designation under the “National Historic Register of Historic Places,” a site must demonstrate the following characteristics: “the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture as present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, are at least 50 years old, and:

- that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or,
- that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or,
- that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or,
- that have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.



Recommendation 4-10 – The County in conjunction with the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District (ECSWCD) should undertake a comprehensive Natural Resources Management Plan to ensure the protection and restoration of the County parks natural systems.



Upstream from Scooby Dam



Example of “mow - no mow” techniques along a park road near Lynchburg, Virginia

4.3.2 PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF NATURAL SYSTEMS

Within the Erie County Park System environmental management strategies will initially focus on the return of maintained landscape areas to a more natural state through reduced mowing. However, with the extent of parkland in a natural state, and the significance of the features contained within, there will also be a need to develop a long term plan for natural heritage preservation, and to identify priority conservation or restoration projects that require remedial action. This will require additional study, and will be a long term initiative for the County. The resource management plan should be based on a Natural Resources Inventory (see Recommendation 4-4) and detailed assessment of the features, priority areas for remediation and habitat restoration, and appropriate management of water resources.

The Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District (ECSWCD), a local government subdivision established under state law that provides natural resources conservation technical assistance to Erie County residents and units of local government, should be consulted in this endeavor, along with the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service which provides technical assistance to the ECSWCD in implementing programs.

4.3.3 ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE PARKS MANAGEMENT

The use of natural landscaping and naturalization of public open space lands is a practice that is well supported through a number of Federal acts and regulations, and implemented at state and local municipal levels. Leading federal agencies are the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Federal Highway Authority (FHA). The EPA provides assistance to municipalities seeking to meet US Clean Water Act regulations, through the implementation of natural planting programs. At the state levels the most concerted effort toward naturalization has taken place along highway and road rights of ways, stimulated by the FHA which

stipulates that 25% of all highway landscaping funds must be spent on the creation and implementation of roadside naturalization programs. Consequently, roadside natural vegetation programs have been undertaken in a number of states.

At the municipal level, the City of Chicago has implemented a number of city naturalization projects including: a parkland naturalization strategy that focuses on the restoration of prairie grasslands, a roadside and boulevard natural landscaping project on Lake Shore Drive, and a comprehensive youth employment program (GreenCorps Chicago) which provides landscape design and management training for school yard naturalization and garden planting programs.

Similarly, north of the border, Ontario's Ministry of Transportation has had a comprehensive integrated roadside vegetation management program in place for some years, incorporating natural landscaping principles and low maintenance practices into all new provincial highway designs. The origins of the naturalization movement in Canada can be traced to the National Capital Commission (NCC), in Ottawa. The objectives of the NCC's longstanding project is the restoration of roadsides, boulevards, parkland and formal open spaces in and around Ottawa, as part of its regional greenway system. In Toronto, the former Metro Toronto Parks and Culture Department first developed a naturalization policy to restore and enhance the metropolitan area valley and waterfront lands. This was later carried over to roadside and boulevard naturalization along city arterial roads, and incorporated into parks and public areas. In 1997, a *Naturalization Compendium* was published that includes a series of best management strategies, a model implementation program and a subsidiary roadside naturalization site selection guide. Work has been carried on by the new City of Toronto, following its amalgamation with several surrounding municipalities, and in 2000 the City established a Healthy Cities Office which supports and promotes community and civic natural landscaping as a part of a "green lungs" air quality improvement strategy.

- Recommendation 4-11– Adopt ecologically sustainable maintenance practices for use in the County Parks.*
- Recommendation 4-12 – Reduce the extent of mown areas in the parks to improve the ecological diversity and quality of the parks, as well as allow the re-allocation of staff resources and funding. Undertake the restoration of sensitive natural features and where appropriate undertake reforestation using ecological succession principles.*
- Recommendation 4-13 – Implement an education program (staff and public) on the benefits of sound environmental management (Refer to Section 7).*



- The benefits of a naturalization program are:*
- Re-establish biological diversity and integrity;*
 - Enhance wildlife habitats;*
 - Protect and enhance environmentally significant areas;*
 - Establish linkages within and throughout the parkland;*
 - Address potential and existing erosion problems;*
 - Control the spread of invasive species;*
 - Mitigate air and noise pollution and storm water runoff; and,*
 - Promote community stewardship of natural areas.*
- (Toronto Parkland Naturalization Compendium, 1998)*



Signage for New York State Parks Regeneration Area

Recommendation 4-14 – Decommission under-used and derelict facilities that do not have heritage significance. Excess parking areas, roads, picnic shelters, and parks buildings that no longer have a role should be removed.

Recommendation 4-15 – Undertake general park improvements that upgrade the appearance of the park and improve the park user experience, i.e. replace/upgrade (or remove) playground equipment, paint picnic shelters, replace/add picnic tables.

Recommendation 4-16 – Undertake park enhancements that make the experience more “user friendly”, and capitalize on the educational and interpretive potential of the parks, i.e. trail system identification, park signage, development of information kiosks.

A move toward naturalized landscapes must be understood and promoted as a landscape management tool whose principal goal is the restoration of ecological systems, rather than simply a reduced mowing regime. Although reduced maintenance costs are a potential outcome, the adoption of a natural landscaping for purely financial reasons undermines broader environmental objectives, and will generate little public support.

4.3.4 GENERAL PARKS IMPROVEMENTS

The Master Plan assessment revealed a park system that offers tremendous recreation potential, as well as a series of unique and memorable scenic, heritage and natural environment resources. However time and limited financial resources have taken their toll on some of the park’s best assets, particularly in the heritage parks. Significant intervention is needed to ensure that the park facilities, heritage structures, and natural environment areas are protected and preserved for future generations. An initial step toward this is the undertaking of general parks improvements that will improve the park user experience and present a revitalized appearance to the parks. These activities include:

- closing and decommissioning facilities that are underutilized or present public safety and liability hazards, i.e. playground equipment, park buildings, redundant roadway or parking areas;
- removing derelict structures, such as picnic shelters, that do not have heritage significance;
- establishing a policy of “restoring” older heritage structures before “building new” structures wherever possible.
- restoring picnic shelters and replacing picnic tables.

An additional move that can be made, with modest capital investment, is the establishment of an interpretive and educational program for each of the heritage parks, that promotes the park’s unique natural and cultural heritage assets. For the most part, trails and facilities are present that will support such a program, however the trail systems should be reviewed to ensure looped routes and improved access to park ‘highlights’ such as scenic lookouts and heritage

features. A park signage system should be added in conjunction with trails maps. To facilitate both renewal and re-use of the heritage structures, facilities such as stone picnic shelters or the numerous well structures in both Chestnut Ridge and Emery Parks could be utilized as information kiosks, or interpretive pavilions. One or more location in each of the heritage parks should be selected as initial demonstration projects. Detailed recommendations for a park signage system are provided in Section 7. Specific opportunities for parks improvements, refinement of park circulation systems, and trails development are provided in the detailed Park Master Plans.

4.4 TOURISM AND MARKETING STRATEGY

4.4.1 TOURISM POTENTIAL

Given the many changes and accomplishments that have taken place in the Erie County Parks system since the last Master Plan was completed, it is important now to take a fresh look at the open space and recreational opportunities for both residents of the County, and visitors. From waterfalls and beaches, to historic sites, golf courses and recreational trails, the Erie County Parks System is an incredible resource. The five parks that represent the County's earliest land acquisitions, and the Buffalo Olmsted Parks System, represent valuable reminders of the County's history, and warrant special efforts toward protection and preservation. These parks, combined with the outstanding scenic qualities of Akron Falls, Emery Park and Chestnut Ridge Park, and the undeveloped parks of Eighteen Mile Creek, Hunters Creek Park and Franklin Gulf, have resulted in a park system that is second to none within New York State. Collectively the Erie County parks offer a unique and marketable experience to County residents and visitors interested in both heritage and nature-based tourist destinations. This represents a powerful marketing and tourism opportunity.

However, the parks "system" is currently not well understood and has limited profile or community awareness. Residents seem familiar with parks that are nearby, but do not recognize the rich and complex natural and cultural resource base that exists within the broader system. Visitors are not introduced to the County parks system or its attractions through general tourism information.



Collectively the Erie County parks offer a unique and marketable experience to County residents and visitors interested in both heritage and nature-based tourist destinations.

RENEWAL is based on the following characteristics, which reflect the unique qualities and mandate of the Erie County Park System:

- RECREATION
- ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
- NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE
- EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION
- WATERWAYS
- ACCESSIBILITY
- LINKAGES

Recommendation 4-17 - Undertake a broad-based marketing program to raise awareness of the “parks system” and the rich cultural and natural history found in the parks. Recognize that this is a powerful marketing and tourism opportunity.

Recommendation 4-18 - Consider creating an Erie County Parks System Visitors Information Center at the centrally located Chestnut Ridge Casino.

Recommendation 4-19- Investigate partner and cross-marketing opportunities with other Counties, local municipalities, cultural heritage and recreation groups to “package” activities to form tourism destination excursions (e.g. park passports, take part in a local festival, have dinner in a restaurant, stay in a local bed-and-breakfast, visit another park etc.)

DOG PARKS

Similar to other park systems all over the country, the Erie County Parks Department is facing the issue of dog runs and leash laws within the parks. Each park system is dealing with their various requests in very careful, unique and site-specific manners. Specific dog run areas or “dog parks” do not necessarily “fit” within the Mission Statement for the Erie County Parks System for regional recreation and should be considered a more localized form of recreation and provided at a local park level by area municipalities.

The Erie County Parks System is a network of open spaces that cater to regional recreational uses with emphasis on the preservation of unique natural areas. In general, the use of fences for the purpose of dog runs is discouraged within the parks system, however, the programmed use of certain open spaces (i.e. meadow areas) for designated leash-free dog areas may be considered. An example would include designating a specific time-period each week for dogs to run free in a controlled and monitored manner. Such designated, programmed open spaces should be located away from other high-use recreation areas and away from roads or other potentially dangerous situations.

Once sufficient upgrades to the County park system have been undertaken to ensure a quality visitor experience (with initial efforts focused on the heritage parks), the County should undertake a broad-based marketing program to raise awareness of the park system and its cultural and natural history. This will require a focused marketing strategy that will extend beyond the County’s usual publicity of the parks. In support of this, a theme of RENEWAL was adopted through the Master Plan process to promote the resources contained within the County Park System, and to serve as a guide for the rejuvenation of the parks. This theme can also be used in future campaigns to foster awareness and support by potential park partners for the park restoration initiatives that are to come, and be used on new marketing materials.

To assist in a cohesive marketing of the County Park system, consideration should be given to establishing a Visitor Information Centre in the Chestnut Ridge Park Casino, with satellite information kiosks (utilizing heritage structures) in each of the five heritage parks and other significant sites such as the Botanical Gardens, and Wendt Beach.

4.4.2 CROSS-MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

To ensure maximum exposure for the County Park system, and to further promote the “heritage” and nature-based tourism (“Eco-tourism”) potential of the County Park system, opportunities for cross-marketing opportunities with other Counties and recreation providers should be investigated. This would involve marketing links to local and regional tourist destinations that are located within the State parks system, as well as in neighbouring Counties. Highlighted features that are both present in the Erie County system, and promoted through other sources, include fishing and birding spots, hiking and mountain biking opportunities, the Lake Erie beaches and natural areas, the Erie Canal Trail and the Buffalo and Niagara River system of parks and natural areas. The County should also seek existing networks and publications that focus on regional tourism such as the “I Love New York!” program.

From a regional cultural and heritage tourism standpoint, cross-marketing opportunities exist between the County's five oldest "heritage" parks (plus the Wendt Mansion) and Buffalo's Olmsted Park System. These parks share many similar characteristics of historic structures and unique landscape settings. Current marketing efforts are underway between many of the city's cultural organizations to share promotions and resources, including the successful "Olmsted Crescent" promotional campaign. Another cross marketing opportunity is to capture some tourist interest from visitors to Niagara Falls and the historic Niagara Reservation State Park.

Improving dialogue on regional economic development should also be sought, such as the upcoming "Framework for Regional Growth" proposed between both Erie and Niagara Counties. This opportunity could translate into better regional land-use decisions, more joint marketing efforts, and better capitalization on links to other area attractions, to the County's benefit (e.g. the nearby "Falls").

Multi-county opportunities and cross-marketing themes that could be explored, in combination with the Erie County Park System, include:

- *Erie-Niagara - Continued Niagara River linkages, connections to the "Falls," Erie Canalway Recreational Corridor, Niagara River Important Bird Area (IBA), Underground Railroad, etc.*
- *Erie -Cattaraugus - Zoar Valley State Park, Ski Country connections (Holiday Valley, Holimont, etc.), Underground Railroad sites, Amish Country, linkages down to Allegany State Park, etc.*
- *Erie-Wyoming - Linkage to Letchworth State Park, etc.*
- *Erie-Genesee - Linkage to Darien Lake State Park and "Six Flags" Amusement Park, etc.*
- *Erie-Chautauqua - Linkage to Lakeshore Recreational trail from Silver Creek and Dunkirk to the Pennsylvania border, Chautauqua Lake, and Chautauqua Institution.*

The County should consider a new updated logo or mark, specifically designed for the Erie County Parks, that can be used for visual communication and "system" "recognition."

New, preferred logo for the EC Parks Department



Various other logo



NEW LOGO

Over the course of this parks master plan study, the theme of “RENEWAL” kept the project team focused and on-track. Out of numerous discussions with private individuals, user groups and governmental officials, it became very apparent that there is much about the Erie County Parks System that people don’t know about, including even which parks are part of the system. Given this dilemma, the need for a new identity for the Parks Department, or “re-branding,” became evident and thus the project team decided to look for a new trademark that could give people a renewed image of Erie County’s wonderful parks system.

After going through various ideas and design iterations, the project team presented a logo that seemed to capture the essence of the Erie County Park System. The new theme or logo includes:

- *Outline of Erie County – an easily recognizable shape to most in Western New York.*
- *An Oak Leaf – a popular and plentiful tree throughout Erie County and one of the longest-lived, strongest and most dominant trees in the parks.*
- *A landscape scene typically found in most of the parks, including a focal water feature and unique landscape setting.*
- *A color scheme representing the colors of the environment.*
 - *Darker Blue representing the extensive County waterfront and numerous waterways, creeks and ponds throughout the parks system.*
 - *Green representing the land, with its undulating landscapes and varied topography, forests and meadows, wildlife and significant environmental features.*
 - *Lighter Blue representing the air and sky.*
- *Title of the Erie County Parks Department, which is simple and to the point.*

4.4.3 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

There is a need for an extensive public outreach program that builds awareness of the parks system, the variety of facilities and the unique heritage assets. The communications strategy should be fully coordinated and should include the Internet, media, brochures, guides, maps and comprehensive facility identification signage. The communication strategy needs to be multi-faceted, easily accessible and highly visual.

Communication tools should include:

- Park system Web site;
- New Erie County Parks logo;
- Park system brochure;
- Park and trails maps; and,
- Photographic compilation of park resources for use in media releases and publications.

The existing Web site designed for the Park Master Plan, should serve as the basis for a new Park web site that can be accessed directly as well as through continued links within the Erie County web site, and the Western New York Regional Information Network (WNYRIN). Links should also be provided to and from appropriate, screened and authorized interest group web sites, to facilitate information management on issues such as trails use, or environmental parks management.

The County should consider a new updated logo or mark, specifically designed for the Erie County Parks, that can be used for visual communication and “system “recognition. The logo should be contemporary in its graphic style, and easily translated onto various mediums (i.e. printed matter, merchandise, T-shirts, signage), and convey something of the heritage or scenic qualities of the park system. Examples of simple graphics that successfully integrate these elements are: the symbol used by the Waterfront Regeneration Trust for the Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail markings (Ontario), and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

As the “renewal” of the park system takes place, the County should continue to take advantage of all opportunities to gain media exposure to heighten public awareness of the County Parks. The media outreach program would include newspaper articles on park projects, State and County funding announcements, and ongoing updates to the web site information.

A Successful Media Outreach Program:

- *has an important story to tell to the public and targeted market segments;*
- *has the capacity to create your own news about the parks programs, facilities, history, and initiatives;*
- *has hard facts and credible spokespeople involved in the telling of your story;*
- *focuses on positive, successes, and initiatives;*
- *coordinates media releases with other non-media activities such as events in the park, volunteer recognition days, facilities/trails openings, funding announcements.*

4.5 PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

It is expected, given current economic conditions, that funding the needed improvements and enhancements within the parks will require not only County resources, but support from other sources (e.g. volunteer groups, the state, corporate sponsors). The County should seek partnerships amongst local municipalities, supporting agencies, and non-government organizations with special interest in the parks. Support can be obtained at both the technical and financial level through agencies such as the *New York State Department of Environmental Conservation* and the *Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District*, both of whom have worked closely with the County in the past on joint venture projects involving environmental restoration efforts.

With the County’s involvement in the Botanical Gardens and recent discussions over the assumption of the Olmsted Park system, a willing partner and role model has emerged in the *Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy*. The not-for-profit,

The efforts of the County, and its partners, would be bolstered by a newly created network of volunteers, cultivated through a ‘Friends of Erie County Parks’ program.

Recommendation 4-20- *Design a comprehensive communication campaign that incorporates a fresh, new park logo that is consistently used on all parks materials.*

Recommendation 4-21 - *Develop a Parks System web site, media packages and series of booklets and guides for park users. This could be done in cooperation with the numerous groups around the County that are already operating parks-related website or promoting specific park attractions. The current project Web site can be utilized as the framework for the future “Parks System” Web site.*

Recommendation 4-22 - *Co-ordinate the graphic material with a comprehensive park signage system to support a new visual image. A system of interpretive and way finding signage should be developed for all parks (Refer to Section 7 for recommendations).*

Recommendation 4-23 – *Continue to create and take advantage of media opportunities, in conjunction with park events, project launches, and funding announcements, to promote the County Park system.*

Recommendation 4-21 - *Build partnerships with local municipalities, agencies, and non-profit organizations, and private sector partners that allow the County to provide a higher quality park than they could undertake otherwise.*

Recommendation 4-19 - *Harness the enthusiasm and knowledge of special interest groups and community volunteers to assist in managing the parks, i.e. trails building, grooming & monitoring, environmental restoration, programming (coordinated through a Friends of Erie County Parks).*

Recommendation 4-18 - *Develop working relationships with organizations like the University of Buffalo, and the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, to improve the quality of services.*

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

TO CREATE A COMMUNITY-BASED VISION FOR DEPARTMENTAL FACILITY-PROGRAM USE AND PARTICIPATION:

- Build ties with the community;
- Determine a quality of life improvement tie with the community;
- Promote joint marketing and communications programs;
- Create an alignment of facilities, programs and services that reflects the contiguous neighborhood's demographic and economic characteristics.

TO DEVELOP A COMMUNITY OUTREACH PLAN:

- Have park employees to speak at civic/public functions held in communities in which they themselves reside;
- Create mechanisms that allow community groups to easily become involved (in order to solve targeted problems of the park); and
- Position the park itself as a community problem solver

TO IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUAL PARK OPERATIONS:

- Facilitate greater use by local groups;
- Have local groups contribute to activity programming, and park clean-up or volunteer planting;
- Institute a "park watch" program for the reporting of problems (vandalism, misuse);
- Find ways for community groups to assist in fundraising efforts for specific projects.

TO MOTIVATE VOLUNTEERS:

- Coordinate efforts with the unions to ensure its support;
- Establish challenging programs with clearly defined goals;
- Monitor and measure success;
- Acknowledge and reward volunteers with recognition

membership-based, community organization grew out of the 'Friends of Olmsted Parks', which was founded in 1978. The Conservancy's mission is to promote, preserve, restore, enhance, and ensure the maintenance of Olmsted-designed parks and parkways in the Greater Buffalo area. The Conservancy is supported through membership fees, donations, fund-raising efforts and an active volunteer program, and undertakes restoration projects, events staging, and park programming.

The efforts of the County, and its partners, would be bolstered by a newly created network of volunteers, cultivated through a 'Friends of Erie County Parks' program. Areas in which volunteer assistance could be provided include environmental and cultural heritage restoration, habitat enhancement projects, trails development and management,

events coordination and park programming.

An appropriate level of volunteer involvement would need to be reviewed with the Unions, to ensure no-conflict. However, examples exist of collaboration between Unions and volunteer programs in other park systems. One example is the

Central Park Conservancy in New York City, which has successfully restored the park's image and quality, through concerted non-profit and volunteer run efforts.



Potential volunteer groups that could provide labour, fund-raising efforts, sponsorship, or in-kind donations of products or services include:

- schools
- religious institutions
- service agencies
- youth groups
- community associations
- college service groups
- local businesses
- professional firms
- special interest groups

The Monmouth County Park System in New Jersey also offers an excellent role model, with a well articulated system of ‘park partners’ that includes a Friends of the Parks, A VIP program (Volunteers in Parks), and the Monmouth Conservation Foundation - a non-profit organization that acquires and holds Monmouth County’s diminishing open space until the Park System or local municipality can purchase and preserve the land. In 2000, the VIP program provided more than 1,100 volunteers and over 24,000 hours to the park system, planting trees, maintaining trails, coordinating and staffing events, and serving as interpretive guides at historic sites.